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(54) **Multiple user telephone accounting**

(57) Businesses with a number of clients have a need to allocate communication costs to the client on whose behalf the costs were incurred. This invention provides a means whereby the telecommunication carrier can charge call costs originating from a single line 2 to one of a plurality of accounts 8 selected by the user of the phone 1. At the exchange 3, a flag 5 associated with line 2 notifies the processor 6 that an account A/C must be selected before a call can be made via line

2. A Recorded Voice Message (RVM) or specific dial tone is sent to the user of the phone 1 to notify him of the need to select an account (optionally after entering a PIN). When the user selects the account, the line 2 is enabled to initiate a call through the network via switch 4. The processor 6 charges the cost for the call to the selected account.

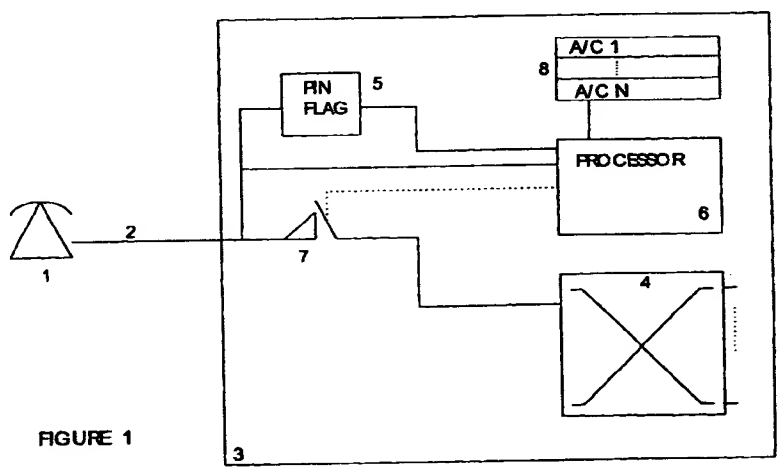


FIGURE 1

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Description

[0001] The following statement is a full description of this invention, including the best method of performing it known to us:

Technical Field

[0002] This invention relates to the charging of telecommunication services and will be described in the context of selectively charging services delivered via a single communication line to a selected one of two or more accounts associated with that line. This may be useful eg. in a solicitor's office where calls are to be billed to different clients.

Backgroundart

[0003] Traditionally the services delivered via a telephone line have been charged to a single account associated with that line. Australian patent No. 664611 describes a telephone subset where the cost of calls may be charged against different users each of whom has a personal identification number, using information stored in the subset. The phone owner could set a credit limit for each PIN, eg., equivalent to a pre-paid amount and the phone could deduct call cost in accordance with tariff scales stored in the phone. However, it was possible to circumvent this arrangement by replacing the PIN locked phone with a standard phone and the call costs would be charged to the phone owner.

Disclosure of the Invention

[0004] This invention provides an arrangement in which telecommunication services provided over a single line can be charged selectively to a selected one of two or more accounts, wherein, at the exchange a flag in a first memory is set indicating that an account access code is required before a call can be initiated from that line, the exchange being responsive to the call access code to enable a call to be established and to charge the call cost to an account identified by at least part of the account access code. According to a first embodiment of the invention, there is provided an arrangement for enabling telecommunication services provided over a line connected to a network to be charged to a selected one of two or more accounts associated with the line, the arrangement including:

- first register means within the network to indicate that the line is associated with said two or more accounts;
- control means responsive to the first register means to prevent the establishment of a connection initiated over the line until an access code has been received over the line;
- wherein, on receipt of the access code, the control

means enables the establishment of a call initiated over the line and causes the cost for the service to be charged to an account identified by the access code.

Brief Description of the Drawings

[0005] The invention will be described with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

Figure 1 is a schematic representation of an arrangement embodying the invention;

Figure 2 is a command flow chart showing the exchange of instructions between the network and the user for setting up an outgoing call.

Best Mode of Carrying out the Invention

[0006] The invention will be described with reference to the drawings in which Figure 1 illustrates schematically an arrangement embodying the invention. In Figure 1, a telephone 1 is connected into the network via a line 2 at exchange 3. The exchange 3 includes a switching matrix 4 and a processor 6 which controls the establishment and charging of calls. In accordance with an embodiment of the invention, an access flag is associated with line 7 to alert the processor 6 that no call is to be set up via line 2 until an account access code has been sent from the user. This feature is illustrated schematically by a switch 7 which can be operated by processor 6 on receipt of the account access code. When the processor 6 receives the access code, the processor enables the caller using phone 1 to set up a call via switching matrix 4 and selects an account in memory 8 identified by the access code to which the call is to be charged.

[0007] Preferably, the network initiates voice messages and/or telephone display messages to guide the user through the process of setting up the system to charge a call to a selected account.

[0008] Preferably, the account access code includes information identifying the account to which the call is to be charged and the system also requires the user to use a PIN to verify the authenticity of the call.

With the trend to sophisticated network management systems, much of the functionality of this arrangement may be at a more centralized location in the network and need not be resident at the point of entry into the network. For instance, the access flag, accounting memory, much of the processing functionality and recorded voice announcement facilities may be located eg. at the network management centre controlling the exchange. Optionally, at the end of each call, the system may be programmed to charge subsequent calls to the same account until a new account is selected or until a predetermined code is entered to prevent outgoing calls until a new account is selected.

[0009] The operation of the arrangement is illus-

trated schematically in Figure 2 at the subscriber's end the user goes Off Hook (OH). This causes the network to send a request for an account access code eg. by Recorded Voice announcement or by a special dial tone (DTX).

The user then enters a predetermined code eg. *15AC* where AC is an account identification number. The network management system verifies that the line is associated with the account. For additional security, the network may request a PIN.

[0010] When the user has provided the account access code (and PIN if necessary) the network activates the account, enables the line, and provides normal dial tone (DT) or otherwise notifies the user to dial the required destination number. The call is established in the normal way when the subscriber dials the required number (DN). At the end of the call the user replaces the handset (RH) and the network terminates the call and charges the cost to the selected account.

Claims

1. An arrangement for enabling telecommunication services provided over a line connected to a network to be charged to a selected one of two or more accounts associated with the line, the arrangement including:
 - first register means within the network to indicate that the line is associated with said two or more accounts;
 - control means responsive to the first register means to prevent the establishment of a connection initiated over the line until an access code has been received over the line;
 - wherein, on receipt of the access code, the control means enables the establishment of a call initiated over the line and causes the cost for the service to be charged to an account identified by the access code.
2. An arrangement as claimed in claim 1, wherein the access code includes account identification information.
3. An arrangement as claimed in claim 1 or claim 2, wherein the network includes network management means responsive to seizure of the line to transmit a signal to the line indicating that an access code is required to be entered.
4. An arrangement as claimed in any more of claims 1 to 3, wherein the network management means verifies that the access code identifies an account associated with the line.
5. An arrangement as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 4, wherein the network management means

requests a security code if it determines that the account is associated with the line.

6. An arrangement as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 5, wherein the first register means and the control means are incorporated in the network management means.
7. A method of enabling telecommunication services provided over a line connected to a network to be charged to a selected one of two or more accounts associated with the line, the method including:
 - storing information within the network to indicate that the line is associated with said two or more accounts;
 - preventing the establishment of a connection initiated over the line until an access code has been received over the line; and,
 - wherein an access code is received, enabling the establishment of a call initiated over the line and charging the cost for the service to an account identified by the access code.
8. A method as claimed in claim 7, including the step of transmitting to the line, in response to the seizure of the line, signal indicating that an access code is required to be entered.
9. A method as claimed in claim 8, including the step of verifying that the account identified in the access code is associated with the line.
10. A method as claimed in claim 9, including the step of requesting a security code if the account is associated with the line, and , on receipt of the security code verifying that it is associated with the line.
11. An arrangement for enabling telecommunication services to be charged to a selected one of two or more accounts associated with a line substantially as herein described with reference to the accompanying drawings.
12. A method of enabling telecommunication services to be charged to a selected one of two or more accounts associated with a line substantially as herein described with reference to the accompanying drawings.

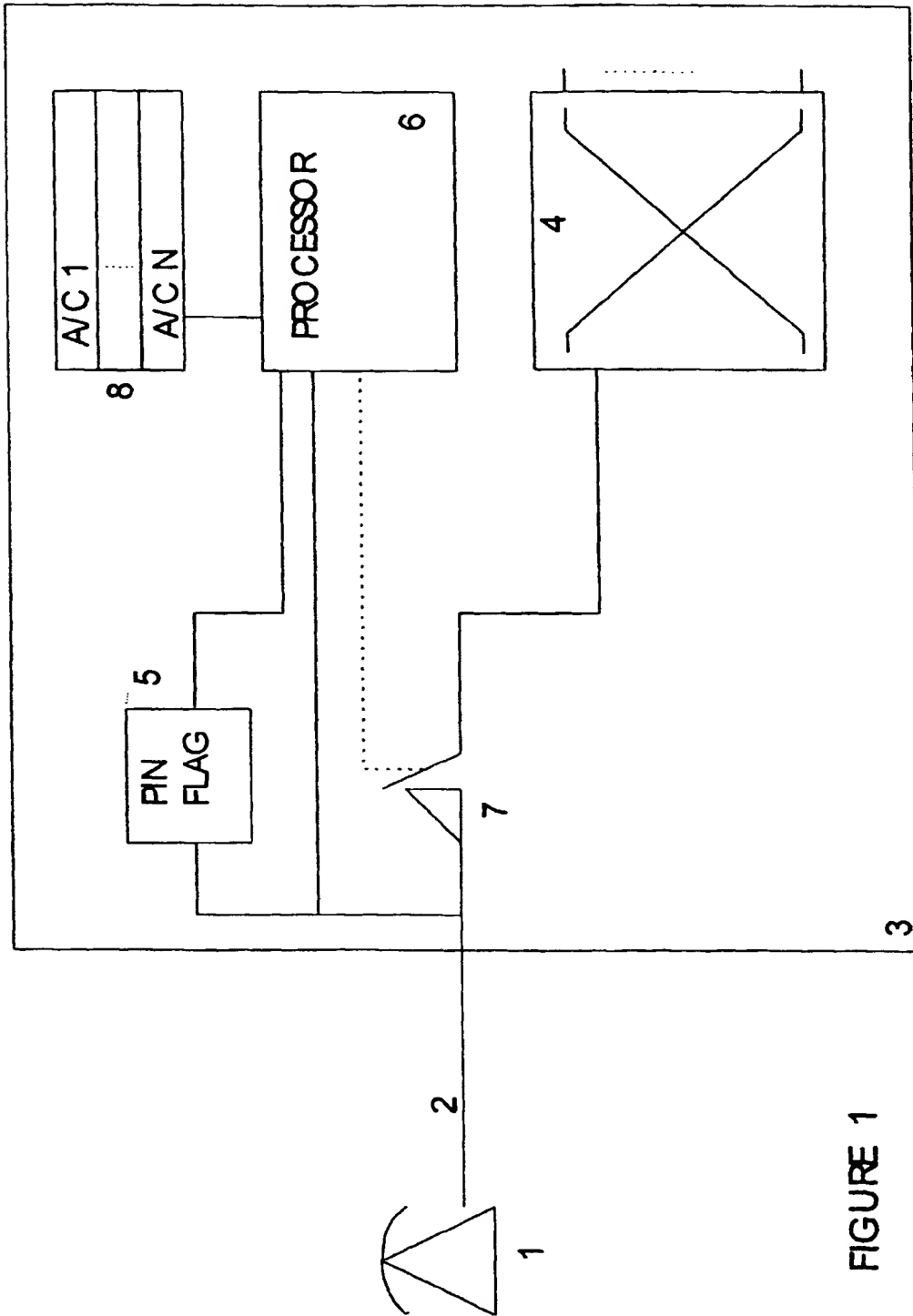


FIGURE 1

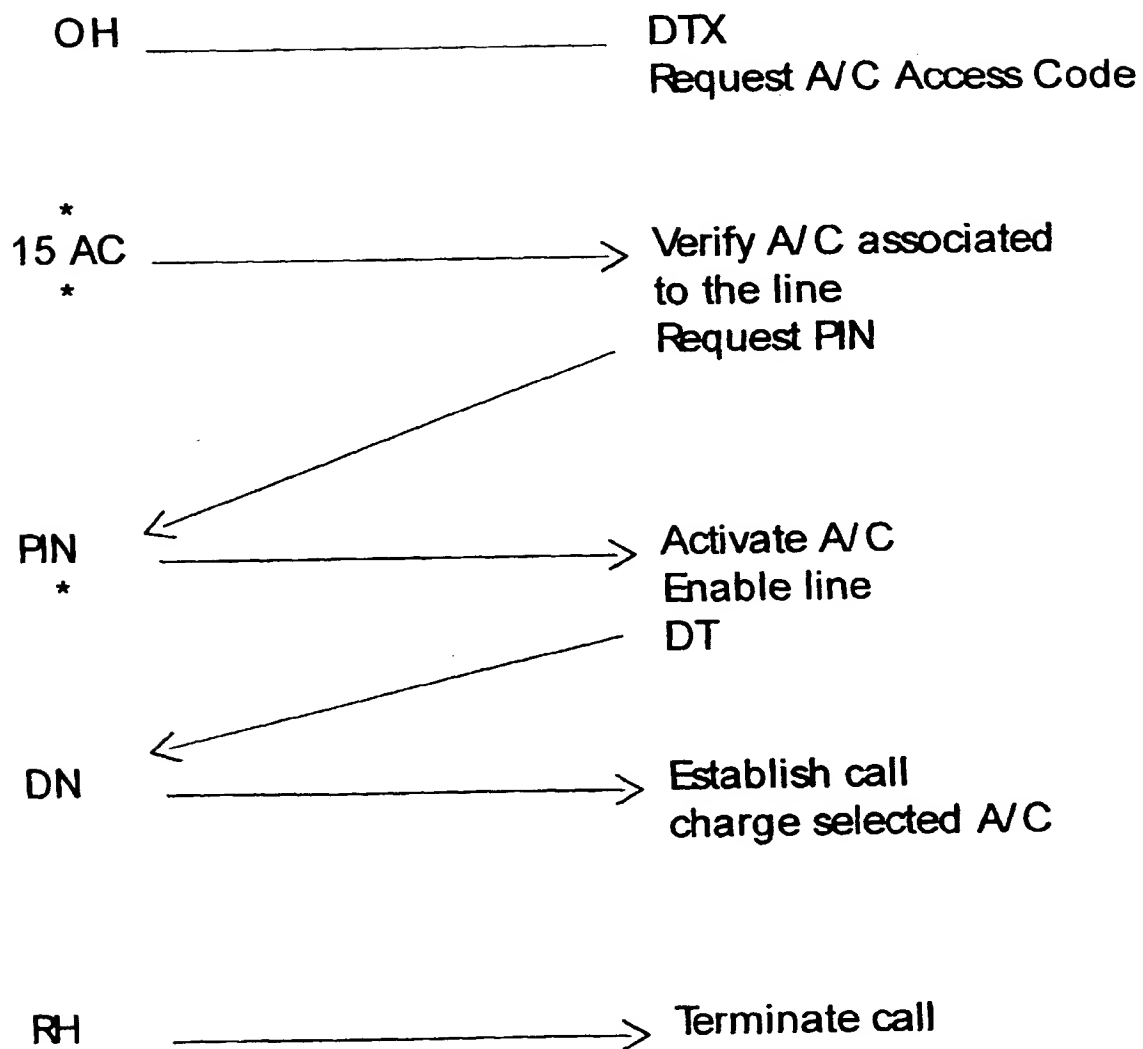
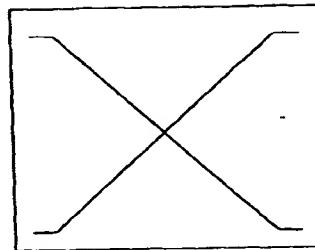
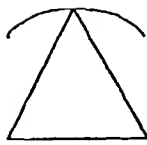


FIGURE 2

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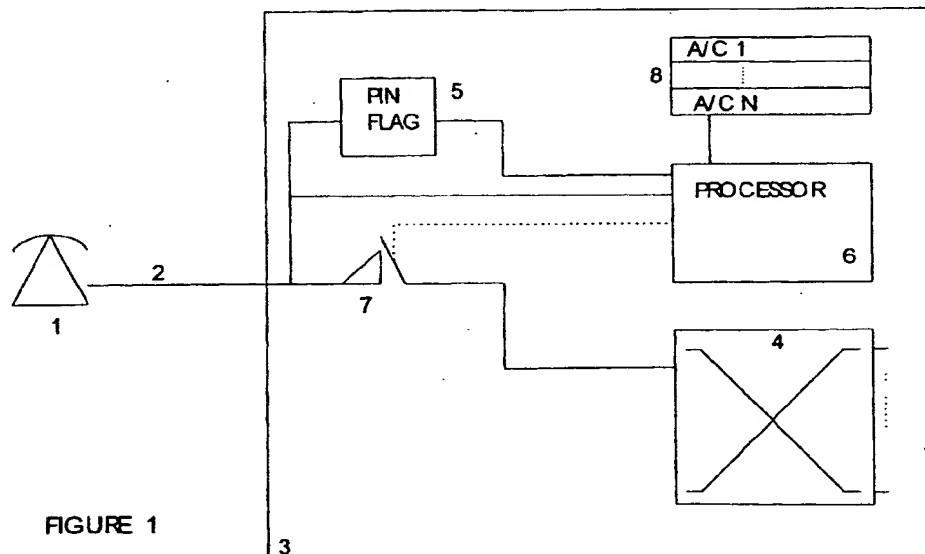


FIGURE 1



European Patent
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EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 99 12 3335

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The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search THE HAGUE		Date of completion of the search 16 March 2004	Examiner Patlaka, E.
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document			

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EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
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Place of search THE HAGUE		Date of completion of the search 16 March 2004	Examiner Patlaka, E.
<p>CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS</p> <p>X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document</p> <p>T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document</p>			

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**ANNEX TO THE EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT
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